

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION WORKSHEET
Clarke County Government Contractors

I. List the Learning(s) that this recommendation is addressing

It is known that the Clarke County Government contracts a number of its maintenance and security workers to private contractors. Three years ago, when asked what are those workers paid, the response in the finance office, anonymously, was “We don’t care about that.” In other words, by interpretation, “We are saving money, so we don’t care about the devastation it causes to the lives of those workers.”

The original rationale for privatization of workers was that it would 1) be more efficient and cost effective, and 2) higher levels of professionalism will increase the quality of services. On the contrary, nationwide, most privatization of services has simply resulted in cost savings because of the utilization of “cheap labor.” Extremely low wages and no benefits are the norm in most cases.

On the other hand, those county workers who are maintained within the county payroll are primarily paid at the living wage level or better, with some exceptions.

- **WRITE THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION** (limit focus to one subject or action item, more than one recommendation may be needed to address a particular learning):**

Given that the State Preemption Law prohibits local governments from enacting any policy that affects wages or benefits of contracted workers and that the county appears to be committed to maintaining a minimum pay near the standard of the living wage, we recommend that the Clarke County Government terminate the contracts and bring the employees back into the county payroll. They could then be paid respectful wages and benefits, as are other employees in the county government.

- **Identify any research, or other kinds of information that was used to craft this recommendation.** (add additional sheets as necessary)

Data was gathered by the Economic Justice Coalition over two years ago on county payroll workers wages and benefits. They looked reasonably respectful, with some exceptions. We were later told that those workers paid below the standard of \$10.50 per hour were raised to that level. More recently, we have been told that the “floor” is really \$9.50 per hour.

As noted, data was reviewed on the contracts over three years ago, but hourly wages were not provided.

- **Identify additional research or information that could help clarify this committee recommendation. List potential sources if possible.**

The county Department of Human Resources can provide up-to-date information on payroll workers.

Additional information is needed on the contracted workers. If it is not provided, we think it can be inferred that the workers are not paid respectfully, with benefits.

- **Indicate people or groups that we need to talk to help clarify this committee recommendation. List any recommended locations.**

The Clarke County Department of Finances and the Department of Human Resources can clarify this recommendation by providing documented evidence and the names and contact information for their contracts.

- **What kind of action or resources would be necessary to implement the recommendation?**

The county commission would need to: a) determine the cost of this recommendation, b) allocate the resources, c) terminate their year round contracts, and d) hire the workers, placing them on the payroll with respectful wages and benefits.

- **Indicate what forces and influences are likely to occur that will support or oppose implementation.**

Forces that support or oppose (please list):

The Mayor and County Commission will argue that they do not have the resources—or that the resources they have are needed for other things.

It has been pointed out by Si Kahn and Elizabeth Minnich, **The Fox in the Henhouse: How Privatization Threatens Democracy**, that privatization removes workers from the scrutiny of the government. In other words, our democratically elected leaders are distanced from their responsibility to treat individual workers fairly. We regard this action as undemocratic.

Overall, we seriously believe that the "disrespected" sectors of the Athens-Clarke County population can be positively impacted by raising wages and by the increased availability of jobs with respectful wages and benefits. Parenting, family cohesion, health status, rates of neighborhood chaos and incarceration rates could all be improved, thus making it more possible for workforce development activities to be fruitful. Under current conditions, these activities will continue to be difficult, if not impossible. There is a cycle there, and the cycle needs to be broken.

We also believe that economic development activity, bringing in new businesses, may simply result in: a) more good jobs going to people outside the county, and b) no impact on workers whose wages are devastatingly low, unless there are specific changes in the wages and benefits at that level.